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ABSTRACT

Research on strategies to influence others, conformity, and compliance with requests demonstrates that status and gender affect strategy choice and compliance rates. Little research, however, has examined strategies used to resist requests. Kahn et al. (1990) explored how gender, status, and intimacy affect resistance strategies among undergraduates. The present study sought to replicate Kahn et al.'s findings with a sample of older adult undergraduate students. Adult students (N=61) read 12 scenarios in which one person asked another person to do something that the other person did not want to do. Subjects then described in writing how they would refuse requests presented in the scenarios which varied by status, closeness, and sex of influencer and resister. The results revealed that the most common reported strategies for resistance were to refuse without giving a reason, refuse by telling the truth, refuse by telling a lie, and bargaining. Respondents reported believing that people with lower status would avoid influence by telling a lie, while peers and higher status individuals would give the true reason for refusal. Respondents also indicated believing that people would refuse by telling the truth most often with strangers. Resister and influencer sex affected the perceived effectiveness and consequences of various strategy types. (NB)

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Strategies for Resisting Influence: The Effects of Gender, Status, and Relationship Closeness

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Strategies for Resisting Influence: The Effects of Gender, Status, and Relationship Closeness

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Abstract

61 adult undergraduates described how they would refuse requests presented in scenarios varying status, closeness, and sex of influencer and resister. Most common reported strategies were refuse without a reason, refuse telling the truth, and refuse telling a lie. Respondents said lower status people would avoid influence by telling a lie, while peers and high status people would give the truth and that people would refuse telling the truth most often with strangers. Resister and influencer sex affected perceived effectiveness and consequences of strategy types.

Strategies for Resisting Influence: The Effects of Gender, Status, and Relationship Closeness

Research on strategies to influence others, conformity, and compliance with requests demonstrates that status and gender affect strategy choice and compliance rates (e.g., Asch, 1956; Cowan, Drinkard, & Macgavin, 1984; Howard, Blumstein, & Schwartz, 1986; Milgram, 1974; Offermann & Kearney, 1988). However, little research examines strategies to resist requests except in particular circumstances, such as sexual advances (Belk & Snell, 1988; Byers, 1988; Wagner, 1988).

Kahn et al. (1990) explored how gender, status, and the intimacy affect resistance strategies. Undergraduate respondents believed that people with lower status avoid influence by telling a lie, while peers and high status people avoid influence by giving the true reason for refusal. Respondents said a person would refuse telling the truth with strangers more than with friends and roommates. Refusing with the truth and with a lie were given equally in coworker relationships. Sex of respondent, resister, or influencer did not influence avoidance strategy choices. The present study seeks to replicate these findings with a different sample, older adult students.

Method

The materials were twelve scenarios in which one person asked another person to do something that the other person did

not want to do (Kahn et al. 1990). Status relationship and genders of influencer and resister were varied systematically. The closeness of the relationship was varied unsystematically. Respondents described in writing how they would refuse the request and indicated on 5-point scales how effective and positive the consequences of refusal strategy would be.

The subjects were 61 undergraduate students, half female and half male, enrolled in Continuing Education courses. Most were adults attending college part time.

Responses were coded independently by two coders using the coding categories developed in previous research (Kahn et al., 1989): Ignore request, pretend to misunderstand, refuse without reason, refuse with true reason, refuse with lie, feign compliance, bargain or compromise, and other. The two coders agreed on 503 (81%) of the 624 scenarios. A third coder agreed with one of the two on 110 of the remaining scenarios, so that agreement of 2 of 3 coders was 98%.

Results

Most common reported strategies were refuse telling the truth (58.7%), refuse telling a lie (17.6%), and bargain/compromise (7.5%).

Insert Table 1 about here

Chi-square analyses revealed no significant effects of sex of resister or influencer. However, respondent sex differed: women were more likely to say they would refuse with the truth (women = 71.2%; men = 59.9%; χ^2=11.93, N = 553, p < .01).

The status relationship between the parties affected strategy choice (χ^2= 56.27, N=560, p < .0001). Respondents believed people with lower status would avoid influence by telling a lie, while peers and high status people would give give the true reason.

Insert Table 2 about here

Strategies varied with the intimacy of the relationship involved, as well. People said a person would refuse telling the truth with strangers. Refuse telling the truth was also common, but less frequent, with friends, coworkers, and roommates. Refusing with a lie was second most common with coworkers and friends (χ^2= 78.72, N = 560, p < .0001).

Insert Table 3 about here

An analysis of variance on the effectiveness of avoidance strategies by respondent sex and strategy type showed a main

effect for strategy type and no interaction effects. Refuse with a lie was seen as most effective (M = 3.83), refuse with the truth as second (M = 3.61), bargain/compromise as third (M = 3.35), and refuse with no reason as least effective (M = 2.91; $F(3,516) = 3.87$, $p < .01$).

Insert Table 4 about here

An analysis of variance on the effectiveness of avoidance attempts revealed another main effect for sex of resister ($F(1,509) = 5.59$, $p < .05$), and 2-way interactions between strategy and influencer sex ($F(3,509) = 2.65$, $p < .05$) and resister sex and influencer sex ($F(1,509) = 4.12$, $p < .05$). Female resisters were seen as more effective than male resisters. Women were seen as less effective when they used refuse with no reason or bargaining; male influencers with female resisters were seen as more effective than other combinations.

Insert Table 5 about here

An analysis of variance on the consequences by sex and strategy type demonstrated a main effect for strategy type. Refuse with no reason (M = 3.34) and with the truth (M = 3.40)

were seen as most positive and refuse with a lie (M = 3.06) and bargain/compromise (M = 2.98) were seen as least positive ($F(3,516) = 3.76$, $p < .05$).

Insert Table 6 about here

An analysis of variance on consequences also showed a 2-way interaction between resister sex and influencer sex ($F(1,509) = 6.88$, $p < .01$), and a 3-way interaction between strategy, resister sex, and influencer sex ($F(1,509) = 4.58$, $p < .01$). Thus, consequences were seen as most positive when a male was influencing another male and worst when a male was influencing a female. The most negative consequences resulted when females influenced males by refusing with no reason; the best consequences resulted when females influenced other females with no reason or by bargaining.

Insert Table 7 about here

Discussion

Generally, the present study replicates the findings of the previous research (Kahn et al., 1990). The same four resistance strategies predominated, i.e., refuse without a reason, refuse

telling the truth, refuse telling a lie, and bargaining. Respondents believed people with lower status will avoid influence by telling a lie, while peers and high status people give the true reason for refusal. Perhaps by lying one reduces the risk of sanctions imposed by a higher status person. When asked to do something by someone of equal or lower status, one has less to lose by resisting honestly.

People said a person would refuse telling the truth with strangers. One may not care what a stranger thinks of the refusal, since the stranger has no future ability to punish one for refusing. Refuse telling the truth was also common, but less frequent, with friends, coworkers, and roommates. Refusing with a lie was second most common with coworkers and friends, again perhaps because it is the easiest way to avoid punishment for refusing. Bargain or compromise was second most common with roommates, who may be able to detect a lie since the relationship is ongoing and intimate.

There were no significant effects on avoidance strategy choice due to sex of resister. However, there was a significant effect of respondent sex, in that women were more likely to say they would refuse with true reason as a response. This finding was repeated in another recent study (Madden et al., 1992.) In the present sample, refuse with a lie was seen as most effective. Are women more honest then men, even if lying might be more effective and safer? Stereotypes might suggest that women feel

less comfortable manipulating people for their own gain. However, before drawing conclusions, one would want to study people's actual behavior rather than perceptions of what they would do and explore in greater depth the reasons that people choose particular resistance strategies in particular situations.

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Table 1

Frequencies of Resistance Strategies Reported

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Compliance	45	7.2
Ignore request	6	1.0
Pretend to misunderstand	0	0
Refuse without reason	37	5.9
Refuse with true reason	366	58.7
Refuse with lie	110	17.6
Feign compliance	2	.3
Bargain, compromise	47	7.5
Other	11	1.8
TOTAL	624	100.00

Table 2

Percentages of Each Resistance Strategy as a Function of Status Relationship between Influencer and Resister

Resistance Strategy	Status Relationship		
	Hi-->Lo	Peers	Lo-->Hi
Refuse with no reason	3.5	5.6	9.2
Refuse with the truth	52.1	75.6	65.5
Refuse with a lie	38.7	7.2	17.6
Bargain/compromise	5.6	11.7	7.6

Table 3

Percentages of Each Resistance Strategy as a Function of Intimacy of Relationship between Influencer and Resister

Resistance Strategy	Intimacy of Relationship			
	Strangers	Coworkers	Friends	Roommates
Refuse with no reason	4.0	4.8	10.7	5.2
Refuse with the truth	84.0	62.0	65.5	63.4
Refuse with a lie	6.0	27.9	22.6	8.2
Bargain/compromise	6.0	5.3	1.2	23.1

Table 4

Effectiveness of Resistance Attempts as a Function of Strategy and Respondent Sex

Resistance Strategy	Respondent Sex		
	Both	Female	Male
Refuse with no reason	2.91	3.38	2.75
Refuse with the truth	3.61	3.54	3.69
Refuse with a lie	3.83	3.75	3.90
Bargain/compromise	3.35	3.35	3.35

Table 5

Effectiveness of Avoidance Attempts as a Function of Strategy, Influencer Sex, and Resister Sex

Resistance Strategy	Female Influencer		Male Influencer	
	Female Resister	Male Resister	Female Resister	Male Resister
Refuse with no reason	1.90	2.33	3.63	3.88
Refuse with the truth	3.66	3.47	3.95	3.41
Refuse with a lie	3.64	4.10	4.48	3.33
Bargain/compromise	3.40	3.00	3.44	3.63

Table 6

Positivity of Consequences of Resistance Attempts as a Function of Strategy and Respondent Sex

Resistance Strategy	Respondent Sex		
	Both	Female	Male
Refuse with no reason	3.34	3.13	3.42
Refuse with the truth	3.40	3.41	3.38
Refuse with a lie	3.06	3.23	2.93
Bargain/compromise	2.98	3.12	2.88

Table 7

Positivity of Consequences of Resistance Attempts as a Function of Strategy, Influencer Sex, and Resister Sex

Resistance Strategy	Female Influencer		Male Influencer	
	Female Resister	Male Resister	Female Resister	Male Resister
Refuse with no reason	3.80	2.50	3.25	3.50
Refuse with the truth	3.33	3.43	3.63	3.20
Refuse with a lie	2.88	3.70	3.24	2.70
Bargain/compromise	2.80	2.75	2.94	3.50